

Notes on the Birds of Some Parts of Kedah.

By E. H. BROMLEY, B.Sc.

This summary, which covers the Alor Star district, Kedah Peak and the Langkawi Islands, is based on observations made during residence in Kedah from June 1936 to March, 1940. The names used are those adopted in the *Handlist of Malaysian Birds* (Chasen, 1935). The subspecific designation is given where only one race occurs in this area. In the few others, such as *Tringa totanus* Linn., where there are known to be or are probably two, which cannot be separated in the field, it has not been specified.

The first draft of this paper was prepared in 1940, but publication has been delayed by the war.

ALOR STAR DISTRICT.

Alor Star is a most interesting locality from the ornithological point of view. In contrast to the remainder of western Malaya, it has well defined seasons, which are exactly suitable for rice cultivation. It receives plenty of rain through the greater part of the year, but is very dry from the middle of December to March.

The small capital town, which is only six miles from the mud-flats and mangroves of the coast, is situated in the centre of the coastal plain of Kedah, devoted to *padi* growing, out of which rise occasional, small limestone hills. These become increasingly numerous northwards to Perlis. The low hills and jungles of the interior are only a few miles distant.

This district appears to be on a well marked north and south migration route. It is, moreover, situated on a fairly definite faunal boundary or overlapping ground, marking the approximate northern limit of many southern forms, and the southern limit of a number of northern forms. This last fact results in the occurrence here, sometimes quite commonly, of races and species not met with, or only rarely encountered, in the southern portion of the peninsula, or, in some cases, of species which are otherwise restricted to the submontane jungles or hills.

In general the following notes do not refer to birds normally common throughout Malaya. They have been written to call attention to some of the more characteristic species, or those having special interest attaching to them. It will be observed that the migration dates are, as a consequence of Alor Star's northerly position in the peninsula, generally much later in the

northward migration, and considerably earlier in the southward movement, than corresponding figures for the more southerly Malay States. The dates given are those of the latest and/or earliest observation in spring and autumn respectively.

Rallus fasciatus Raffles.

Malay Banded Crake.

Especially abundant during the autumn migratory period when they are apparently augmented by migrants from the north. These fall an easy prey to Malay trappers who catch them in large numbers.

Gallicrex cinerea plumbea (Vieill.).

Water-Cock.

Fairly common in swampy padi land; I have notes on this species for 29 May, 1938, and 27 May, 1939, and then not again till September or October, but as my opportunities for observation were limited, it is possible that it breeds here.

Porphyrio albus viridis Begbie.

Purple Moor-Hen.

Appears to be resident in swampy padi areas. I have seen specimens caught on 6 August, 1939.

Waders and other Shore-line Families.

The coastal mud-flats are plentifully populated at suitable seasons with these birds, but I have not had adequate opportunities of analysing their relative status and occurrence. Species well represented include *Charadrius leschenaultii* Less. & *C. mongolus* Pallas, *Numenius phaeopus* (Linn.), *Erolia testacea* (Pall.), *Xenus cinereus* (Guld.), *Tringa totanus* (Linn.), *T. hypoleucos* Linn., besides a few *T. nebularia* (Gunn.), and some terns.

The following species are found inland:

Charadrius apricarius fulvus Gmel.

Golden Plover.

Very common. Migration dates: in 1938, 10 April and 24 August (and on 30 August more than a dozen showing a great deal of the black of the breeding plumage); in 1939, 7 May (13 birds, about a third of which were in full breeding plumage and others in states of transition) and doubtfully on 17 May, then back on 18 September.

Charadrius dubius Scop., Sub-sp.

Little Ringed Plover.

Common, particularly at Alor Star aerodrome.

Capella stenura (Bp.).

Pintail Snipe.

So plentiful in such a suitable locality as to provide excellent shooting. Migration dates: spring—no records: autumn—1938, 25 August onwards; 1939, on 25 July I saw a bird that was unmistakably a snipe (carefully examined with binoculars from a

distance of about 30 yards) by the Kuala Kedah road; a question arises as to whether this bird was returning or had never left; the next bird noted after the July date above was on 18 September.

Capella g. gallinago (Linn.).

Fantail Snipe.

An occasional specimen turns up in a sportsman's bag; I noted one such on 19 September, 1939.

Glareola pratincola maldivarum Forst.

Collared Pratincole.

Far commoner in Alor Star than in any other place of my acquaintance. In 1939, I have records of these birds on five dates in March, four in April, eighteen in May, five in June (when I was absent for three and a half weeks), two in July, the last on 28 July. Figures for other years are similar. The dates of their first appearance each year are very regular, 5 March, 1938, 3 March, 1939, 4 March, 1940. Their last regular occurrence is usually some time in July, but I have doubtful records for 24 August and 26 October, 1938. It would appear that the bird is a summer visitor, and absent during the winter.

Ibis cinereus (Raffles).

Southern Painted Stork.

Some rather doubtful records.

Leptopilus javanicus (Horsf.).

Lesser Adjutant.

An interesting winter visitor which I have only noted from December to March, during Kedah's very dry season.

Ardea purpurea manillensis Meyen.

Purple Heron.

May be observed in flooded padi lands.

Egretta alba modesta (Gray).

Large Egret.

Egretta i. intermedia (Wagl.).

Lesser Egret.

Egretta g. garzetta (Linn.).

Little Egret.

Mixed assemblies of egrets congregate in the padi fields in large flocks prior to their northward migration. In flying to roost they follow the course of rivers south of Alor Star in very large numbers, which increase daily.

Generally speaking, these three white egrets arrive when the cattle egrets are beginning to go north (*see below*), and stay on much later. They do not appear to show signs of any lengthened plumes or other characteristics of the breeding plumage. 5 June, 1939, was the latest date on which I saw white egrets; I am unable to say with certainty which species is the last to leave, but I have good reasons for believing that *E. alba* has this distinction. *E. garzetta* seems to leave about a fortnight earlier, soon after the cattle egrets.

Again there is some doubt over the white egrets in the matter of returning dates. In 1938, I saw what appeared to be *E. garzetta* for the first time on 15 October, and a single *E. alba* on 25 October. In 1939, I saw white egrets on 22 October but here unfortunately I cannot state the species definitely. Furthermore, the return migration seems to be somewhat prolonged and mixed, for on 1 December, 1939, I saw a flock of egrets which were almost certainly returning migrants. They included some *E. garzetta* in winter plumage, with no elongated plumes, but with black bills, and two birds considerably larger than the others, with greeny yellow bills, the remains of a crest and apparently with some dorsal plumes projecting slightly beyond the tail; from this description, particularly the crest, these would appear to have been *E. intermedia*; on the following two days I saw *E. garzetta* and *E. alba*, evidently migrants just returned.

Ardeola ibis coromanda (Bodd.).

Cattle Egret.

Cattle Egrets, nearly all in full chestnut breeding plumage, are the first to go north; on 9 April, 1939, at 7 a.m., I saw many thousands of these birds flying north in groups of two or three hundred with short breaks between them, passing continuously for at least a quarter of an hour. It is difficult to give exactly the date when the last stragglers leave, as these seem to associate with the white egrets, and it is not easy to pick them out of a large flock in the distance. By the second week in May the last cattle egrets seem to have left; in 1938, I definitely saw birds in chestnut plumage on 8 May, and possibly also on 10 May; in 1939, I have only doubtful records after 2 May. I saw the first returning Cattle Egrets on 26 September, 1938, and 29 September, 1939.

Ardeola ralloides bacchus (Bp.).

Chinese Pond-Heron.

A very common bird in winter; the latest and earliest dates for 1938 were 25 April and 7 October.

Ixobrychus s. sinensis (Gmel.).

Yellow Bittern.

One may sometimes see this species in winter in suitable reedy patches. I definitely saw one bird on 2 September, 1938, near Kepala Batas, Province Wellesley; this is a month earlier than the dates given by Robinson and Chasen (1936, p. 197).

Ixobrychus c. cinnamomeus (Gmel.).

Chestnut Bittern.

As one would expect, chestnut bitterns are abundant; I found several nests in a small patch of sedges about 200 yards from my house.

Pseudogyps bengalensis (Gmel.).

White-backed Vulture.

Ceyx e. erithacus (Linn.).

Three-toed Kingfisher.

On 20 March, 1938, a dead specimen was picked up on the verandah of the S. A. H. College building; it had evidently struck the wall in the dark.

Anthracoceros coronatus leucogaster (Blyth).

Northern Pied Hornbill.

Apparently the commonest hornbill in the district.

Rhyticeros undulatus (Shaw).

Wreathed Hornbill.

Appears to be commoner in the jungles near Alor Star than any other hornbill, except the previous species; it may even be seen flying near the Bukit Pinang Reservoir on a small hill near the aerodrome.

Merops l. leschenaulti Vieill.

Bay-headed Bee-eater.

Makes spasmodic visits to the locality.

Lyncornis c. cerviniceps Gould.

Giant Nightjar.

May often be observed at the Bukit Pinang Reservoir, as well as along the road to Siam, and sometimes even over the aerodrome.

Clamator coromandus (Linn.).

Red-winged Crested Cuckoo.

On 17 April, 1938, I saw one of these birds flying over padi fields, almost certainly on migration.

Surniculus lugubris (Horsf.) sub-sp.

Black Drongo-Cuckoo.

I have seen this species near Bukit Pinang.

Hierococcyx fugaz (Horsf.) sub-sp.

Hawk-Cuckoo.

May sometimes be seen as a winter visitor in the residential area.

Cacomantis variolosus sepulcralis (S. Mull.).

Fan-tailed Cuckoo.

Observed as a daily visitor from 7-9 August, 1939, possibly a passage migrant.

Eudynamys scolopaceus (Linn.) sub-sp.

Koel.

An exceedingly common winter visitor.

Rhopodytes tristis longicaudatus (Blyth).

Large Green-billed Malkoha.

A familiar garden bird but, except for a doubtful reference on 1 December, 1939, I only encountered the species in Kedah between 11 March and 30 September, though I saw one near Képala Batas in Province Wellesley on 15 October, 1936; this might indicate some local migration.

Thereiceryx zeylanicus intermedius Baker. Dull Barbet.

Almost the commonest species in Alor Star; the breeding season seems to extend through the whole year, with a possible lull between June and August, as I have no notes of breeding during these months.

Xantholaema haemacephala indica (Lath.). Coppersmith Barbet.

Very common.

Callolophus miniaceus malaccensis (Lath.). Banded Red Woodpecker.

Abundant.

Hirundo rustica gutturalis Scop. Common Swallow.

Migration dates: 30 May and 18 July, 1938; 9 June and 15 July, 1939. These dates, which are taken from series of careful observations before and after the migration periods, indicate that only about six weeks separate the last stragglers and the first returning birds.

Hirundo daurica badia (Cass.). Cliff-Swallow.

Very common on Bukit Pinang and northwards into Perlis.

Alseonax l. latirostris (Raffl.). Brown Flycatcher.

A very common garden bird in the winter months. Migration dates: 20 April, 1937; 8 April and 14 October, 1939 (doubtfully on 8 and 15 September).

Gerygone fusca sulphurea Wall. Davison's Flycatcher.

Abundant, frequently nesting in gardens. I have heard this bird's unmistakable songs as far south as Port Dickson in Negri Sembilan, though it is much commoner in the north of the Peninsula. Davison's Flycatcher would appear to be habitually victimised by the Malay Cuckoo (Bromley, 1941, p. 143).

Zanthopygia narcissina zanthopygia (Hay). Black-and-Yellow Flycatcher.

I observed a bird of this species, a rare visitor to Malaya, in my garden on 8 April, 1939; possibly a passage migrant.

Rhipidura javanica longicauda Wall. Fantail Flycatcher.

Abundant, frequently nesting in gardens.

Terpsiphone paradisi (Linn.) sub-sp. Paradise Flycatcher.

This species turns up with regularity on passage during the migration periods; I saw birds in my garden on 26 April, 1938, on 11 November, 1936, and 28 October and 5 November, 1938; in 1939, I saw one as early as 8 September.

BIRDS OF SOME PARTS OF KEDAH

Pycnonotus blanfordi robinsoni O.-Grant. Blanford's Bulbul.

A very common garden bird; its southernmost limit is usually given as Peninsular Siam, but it certainly occurs in Kedah.

Pycnonotus jocosus erythretis (Sp.). Red-whiskered Bulbul.

A common garden bird.

Saxicola torquala stejnegeri (Parrot). Stone-Chat.

May frequently be seen in winter on the Alor Star steeplechase course and similar situations.

Acrocephalus stentoreus orientalis (Temm. & Schleg.). Great Reed-Warbler.

Most abundant. When all the pools and reed-beds dry up between January and March, this species transfers itself to gardens, where its peculiar cracked song may be heard daily till quite late in the year, when it leaves on migration. Dates: 14 May, 1939; 3 May, 1938; 28 September 1938 (doubtfully on 18 September and subsequent dates).

Orthotomus sutorius maculicollis Moore. Long-tailed Tailor-Bird.

The common tailor-bird of gardens here, as elsewhere in western Malaya.

Orthotomus sepium ruficeps (Less.). Ashy Tailor-Bird.

This species seems to replace *O. a. atrogularis* (Temm.), the Black-necked Tailor-Bird, along the streams and in the mangroves.

Phylloscopus occipitalis coronatus (Temm. and Schleg.). Larger Crowned Willow-Warbler.

Phylloscopus b. borealis (Blas.). Arctic Willow-Warbler.

Phylloscopus i. inornatus (Blyth). Crowned Willow-Warbler.

The first and either second or third, or possibly both the latter, are occasionally seen passing through. 28 October and 5 November, 1938, are dates on which I observed one or other of them. No doubt if one had more opportunities for observation more of these small warblers would be noted.

Lanius cristatus Linn. sub-sp. Brown Shrike.

Migration dates: 26 May; 11 September, 1938; 11 May, 8 September, 1939.

Lanius schach bentet Horsf.

Grey-backed Shrike.

Occurs periodically, especially near the Alor Star steep-lechase course, but it is doubtful whether it comes under the category of winter visitor, since I observed it on 2 March, and 29 and 31 July, 1939.

Motacilla flava Linn sub-sp.

Yellow Wagtail (Probably mostly Blue-headed).

About two dozen yellow wagtails, mostly immature, passed through Alor Star on 9 and 10 October, 1939, feeding on the S. A. H. College padang during the day.

Dendronanthus indicus (Gmel.).

Forest Wagtail.

Migration date: 16 September, 1939.

Passer flaveolus (Blyth).

Pegu House-Sparrow.

Formerly only recorded from as far south as the northern end of Peninsular Siam; during the time of my residence in Alor Star the species established itself in this locality, and became a common breeding bird, even nesting in my own garden. (Bromley, 1941, p. 140).

Ploceus philippinus infortunatus Hart.

Weaver-Bird.

Very numerous and nests in many gardens.

Aethiopsar fuscus torquatus (Davison).

Buffalo Myna.

Not uncommon.

Crypsirina temia (Daud.).

Racquet-tailed Magpie.

An interesting and very common species in Alor Star, and resident throughout the year. For 1938, I have notes on this species on ten dates in April, seven in May, one in June (during which I was away for three and a half weeks), three in July, five in August and one in September, in addition to winter references. I could quote similar figures for other years.

KEDAH PEAK.

Residents of Alor Star have opportunities for spending holidays in a bungalow at an altitude of about 3,400 feet on Kedah Peak (Gunong Jerai), an isolated mountain which rises to almost exactly 4,000 ft. out of the surrounding padi plain. Robinson (1928, p. xi) states that its bird fauna is impoverished. This is true, but nevertheless some interesting forms are met here, including several migrants. The following list is by no means complete, but indicates some of the points of interest.

Rostratula b. benghalensis (Linn.).

Painted Snipe.

A most unusual species for a hill station; this must surely be one of the very few waders that regularly visits high altitudes, and probably Kedah Peak is exceptional in being an isolated mountain. I saw this species daily from 28 November, 1938, and found the moist mud patches in the scrub, where wild pig had been grubbing near the bungalow, marked with their toe-prints and pitted with hundreds of holes where their bills had been probing. In 1939, I saw a Painted Snipe here on 5 December, and subsequently discovered traces of them in the mud patches, but saw no more birds for the remainder of a fortnight's stay. Just at this time of the year the very wet weather ends and gives place to Kedah's long dry season. It is probable that these birds take to the peak, when the ground below is water-logged, and return to the plains in the drier weather.

Ictinaetus malayensis (Temm.).

Black Eagle.

Almost certainly noted.

Spizaetus nipalensis alboniger (Blyth).

Blyth's Hawk-Eagle.

Common here as on other mountains.

Harpactes oreskios uniformis Rob.

Orange-breasted Trogon.

Occurs in the jungle near the bungalow.

Hierococcyx vagans (S. Mull).

Small Hawk-Cuckoo.

A very rare Malayan bird, only three or four specimens having been obtained in the Malay States. I was able to watch a bird near the waterfall about half a mile from the bungalow on 17 December, 1939, for about a quarter of an hour through binoculars from distances varying from about 30 yards upwards, as the bird changed its perch from time to time, flitting noiselessly through the jungle; the rufous barring on its wings and other characteristics established its identity beyond question.

Zanclostomus javanicus pallidus Rob. & Kloss.

Red-billed Malkoha.

Very common, particularly in the short scrub near the bungalow.

Pollomyias mugimaki (Temm.)

Black-and-Orange Flycatcher.

This bird is common in November and December, even making sallies from shrubs in the bungalow garden.

Chloropsis cochinchinensis icterocephala Less.

Green Leaf-Bird.

Chloropsis c. cyanopogon (Temm.). Blue-Whiskered Leaf-Bird.

Ixos c. cinereus (Blyth).

Ashy Bulbul

Ixos malaccensis (Blyth)

Streaked Bulbul.

Pycnonotus s. simplex Less

Moore's Olive Bulbul.

Pycnonotus brunneus Blyth sub-sp.

Brown Bulbul.

Pycnonotus c. cyaniventris Blyth.

Grey-bellied Bulbul.

Alcippe c. cinerea Blyth.

Nun-Thrush.

Erpornis zantholeuca interposita Hart.

White-bellied Babbler.

Kedah Peak seems to be a favoured habitat for the above species, all of which are very common.

Kenopia striata (Blyth).

Striped Babbler.

(?) *Cyanoderma e. erythroptera* (Blyth).

Red-winged Babbler.

Less easily observed, but probably fairly numerous. I am in some doubt as to the identity of the latter species; without seeing it, one becomes aware of its presence by a very soft *chep* continuously repeated, provided one remains absolutely noiseless and still for some time. Both these species flit or hop about quietly, busily looking for food in thick bracken and undergrowth, and are exceedingly difficult to observe.

Geokichla sibirica (Pall.) sub-sp.

Siberian or Davison's Ground-Thrush.

Both male and female of this species daily frequented some berry-laden trees (favourite resort also of bulbuls, leaf-birds, etc.) during the first fortnight of December, 1939, and thus seemed to belie their name of "ground" thrush; I did not once see them near the ground.

Locustella lanceolata (Temm.). Streaked Grasshopper-Warbler.

Observed two or three times near the bungalow in the last week of November, 1938.

Phylloscopus b. borealis (Blas.).

Arctic Willow-Warbler.

Phylloscopus occipitalis coronatus (Temm. & Schleg).

Larger Crowned Willow-Warbler.

I have seen the former and possibly the latter willow-warbler on a few occasions on the peak.

Lanius cristatus Linn. sub-sp.

Brown Shrike.

Observed a few times near the bungalow in the last week of November, 1938, and also during the first fortnight of December, 1939. On one occasion the bird was heard singing quietly to itself for some time in a leafy shrub.

Aethopya mystacalis temmincki (S. Mull). Scarlet Sunbird.
Leptocoma b. brasiliensis (Gmel.). van Hasselt's Sunbird.
 Both species abundant near the bungalow.

Motacilla cinerea melanope (Pall.). Grey Wagtail.
Anthus hodgsoni ? *inopinatus* Hart & Steib. Tree-Pipit.

These two species were daily visitors to the bungalow clearing in both 1938 and 1939 (November—December). The latter is reputed to be a rare winter visitor, but it is common enough in season on Kedah Peak; I saw a scattered flock of about a dozen birds on each visit. When alarmed the birds always took to the trees on the edge of the jungle.

LANGKAWI ISLANDS.

The Langkawi Islands, a few hours' launch trip from Alor Star, are of considerable interest to an ornithologist. The land birds are not without interest, but it is the birds of the coasts and surrounding waters that provide the chief attraction. A few notes summarised from observations made during a short visit from 3 to 12 December, 1938, are given below.

Tringa totanus (Linn.) sub-sp. Redshank.

Abundant on shores of bays and mud-flats together with other waders.

Oceanites o. oceanicus (Kuhl.). Wilson's Storm-Petrel.

Three or four of these birds were observed about midday on 12 December, 1938, while crossing from the islands to the mainland.

Ardea s. sumatrana Raffles. Dusky-grey Heron.

Isolated birds may be observed in lonely bays, usually those with muddy shores.

Demigretta s. sacra (Gmel.). Reef-Heron.

Abundant on the rocky headlands; the majority of birds that I observed were in the dark phase.

Sula leucogaster plotus (Forst.). Brown Gannet.

One seen in the afternoon when crossing to Langkawi from the mainland on 3 December, 1938.

Fregata a. ariel Gray. Least Frigate-Bird.

I have observed this species near the islands in December.

Pandion haliaetus (Linn.) sub-sp. Osprey.

An interesting species (apparently becoming commoner in Malaya in recent years), which one may observe near the cliff-like sides of the "inland sea"; I have also seen it quartering over padi fields inland.

Anthracoceros coronatus leucogaster (Blyth). Northern Pied Hornbill.

Very common, being seen, or its peculiar "song" heard, in almost every clearing and near the beaches of even the smallest islands; it is by no means restricted to the jungle.

Rhyticeros undulatus (Shaw). Wreathed Hornbill.
Common.

Chrysocolaptes lucidus guttieristatus (Tick.). Golden-backed Four-toed Woodpecker.

Of the two golden-backed woodpeckers the four-toed species appears to be commoner; this form is not found in the greater portion of the Malay States, but I have also observed it in Perlis.

REFERENCES.

- BROMLEY, E. H., 1941. Notes on Malayan Birds, *Malayan Nature Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 140-146.
CHASEN, F. N., 1935. A Handlist of Malaysian Birds, *Bull. Raff. Mus.*, No. 11, pp. 1-389.
ROBINSON, H. C., 1928. *The Birds of the Malay Peninsula*, Vol. 2. Witherby, London.
ROBINSON, H. C., and CHASEN, F. N., 1936. *The Birds of the Malay Peninsula*, Vol. 3. Witherby, London.